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Article published Nov 16, 2006

Murder trial jurors visit girl's home

While Joe Simmons sat alone on the sofa, a group of strangers wandered through his home Wednesday to examine a staircase that some say was the spot where his daughter fell and suffered massive, fatal injuries.

Jurors in the Sonya Moussaed murder trial quietly walked up and down the narrow, carpeted stairway in the house on Hubble St. While prosecutors, police officers and defense attorneys stood nearby, the jurors, for the most part, did not speak.

Day three of the trial mostly was spent at Mr. Simmons' house, where his 17-month-old daughter, Gracie, died. The defense says it was because she tumbled down the stairs by accident. The prosecution says it was at the hands of Ms. Moussaed during a fit of rage.

Today, the trial continued before Monroe County Circuit Judge Joseph A. Costello Jr. Defense attorney Lawrence Coogan was expected to continue calling witnesses, including renowned forensic expert Dr. Werner Spitz. Jurors begin deliberating today.

On Wednesday afternoon, most of the trial proceedings were held in Mr. Simmons' house. Only one witness testified in court and the jurors drove to the Hubble St. home for the brief tour.

Judge Costello, wearing his robe, met the jurors in front of the house as they arrived separately around 2 p.m. A Monroe police car was parked nearby.

They filed into the house, which showed signs of remodeling but was tidy. The studs were exposed on the walls in a small hallway near the stairs that led to the second floor. There was no visible construction debris and the floors were not covered in plastic.

The defense claims that Ms. Moussaed was at the top of the stairs holding Gracie when she tripped over some plastic on the floor. As she stumbled, Gracie fell out of her hands and down the stairs. Mr. Coogan argued that the toddler did not have any visible signs of injury except to her lip. She appeared fine and was put to bed. Ms. Moussaed checked on her on the morning of April 20 and found her dead, the defense argued.

But Monroe County Assistant Prosecutor Allison Arnold, backed by testimony of medical and child abuse experts, maintains that Ms. Moussaed beat the child to death and created the story of the staircase fall to cover her tracks.

Ms. Arnold, supported by testimony of witnesses, said Ms. Moussaed changed her story several times and lied to police and family members to hide the truth.

Ms. Moussaed, who used to live at the Hubble St. home with Mr. Simmons, did not accompany the jury on the tour Wednesday.

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Indiana Mom Arrested In Deaths Of 4 Children

POSTED: 4:30 am EST November 17, 2006

ELKHART, Ind. -- The mother of four young children found dead in their Indiana home Tuesday has been arrested in connection with their deaths.

Angelica Alvarez, 27, was found unconscious next to the bodies of her two daughters and two sons, ages 2 to 8.

Police in Elkhart arrested Alvarez on Thursday at the hospital where she was listed in critical condition.

Prosecutors have until next Wednesday to decide whether to charge her.

The children were suffocated.

Police had initially said there was no indication that Alvarez was involved in the killings and would not say what led them to change their minds.

But records of calls made to police from the home show there had been custody disputes between Alvarez and her first husband, who was the father of the two oldest children.

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November 17, 2006

Response to Child Deaths Suggests a System Poised to Work

By [LESLIE KAUFMAN](#)

Notorious child deaths in New York often result in a sharp increase in the number of calls to child abuse hot lines. That is what happened in November 1995 after the death of 6-year-old [Elisa Izquierdo](#), which prompted the city to create the Administration for Children's Services.

For a year after Elisa was tortured and fatally beaten by her mother on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, reports citywide were up by roughly 12 percent, to an average of 4,500 calls a month.

But child welfare authorities say they are astounded by what has happened this year. After the highly publicized parental abuse and beating death of 7-year-old Nixzmary Brown in Brooklyn in January, complaints soared to record highs — nearly 8,000 in the first month — then leveled off at an average of 32 percent above 2005 figures. For October, the most recent month for which the city has data, there were roughly 6,000 reports of child abuse and neglect, up by 37 percent over last year.

There have been peaks and valleys in the numbers. But city officials say the high average rate of complaints is the result of several factors, most strikingly the improved coordination with schools to ensure that they report when children miss consecutive school days, as Nixzmary did.

The officials say this heightened awareness means cases are being caught early, preventing tragic outcomes. They liken it to the "broken windows" approach to fighting crime: stop criminals when they commit minor acts of vandalism, and they will never graduate to more serious offenses.

"What we learned from the Nixzmary case is that we want a system in place that produces a quick response to early signs that will prevent a situation from worsening," said Deputy Mayor Linda I. Gibbs, who is leading a task force to coordinate efforts among city agencies in spotting abuse.

But advocates who say that more children should be kept with their parents see a dark side: more children in foster care for longer periods of time. Indeed, the number of children the city places into foster care is rising at a faster pace since Nixzmary's death, up by about 55 percent over the first 10 months of last year, which amounts to 2,195 more children. That trend, however, masks a different, perhaps more significant fact: There were 16,256 New York City children in foster care over all at the end of July, the fewest in two decades.

After Elisa's case, the number of children in foster care remained above 41,000. But there were few measurable improvements in their safety for several years.

"During periods of time of increased reporting and increasing placement we've seen increased fatalities," said Michael Arsham, executive director of the Child Welfare Organizing Project.

Mr. Arsham worries that families with marginal problems will not seek basic services out of fear that child welfare authorities will be too willing to take children into foster care.

“Increased reporting strains relationships between families and their children’s schools and health care providers,” he said. “In effect it can drive families away from the services needed to keep their children safe.”

Child welfare officials say that removals to foster care as a percentage of complaints have risen only a bit — to 11.4 percent, up from 9.4 percent. They add that the cases that do lead to removal are serious. City officials note that while the rate of placement in foster care has increased, the total number of children in foster care has decreased as more families are kept together but with continual supervision by Family Court.

As for complaints, in the 10 years between the Elisa and Nixzmary cases there have been numerous fluctuations in numbers of hot line calls, sometimes propelled by high-profile abuse cases, sometimes for reasons that are unclear.

Yet officials have been surprised by the sustained level of calls since the death of Nixzmary.

One main reason, they believe, has been the much stricter enforcement of a 10-day rule for reporting educational neglect. If a child misses 10 consecutive days, his or her school is obligated to investigate. If school officials cannot find any reasonable cause, such as sickness, then the officials must call the case in to the state hot line for abuse.

The schools have instituted new tracking mechanisms to make sure cases do not fall between the cracks. For example, principals now receive weekly reports on any investigations of attendance problems that drag on for more than 10 days.

Previously, schools had been lax in following such guidelines, often waiting until before the long winter break or more commonly the end of the school year to report excessive absences. The first educational neglect report on Nixzmary came in May 2005, when she had already missed 46 days of school.

“This is a preventive measure,” said Michele Cahill, the senior counselor for education policy to [Joel I. Klein](#), the schools chancellor, who says reports of abuse and neglect from school staff members were up by 41 percent in the first half of 2006 over the previous year. “I don’t think a Nixzmary Brown situation could happen again.”

While educational neglect is often not reason enough to remove a child from his or her home, it can combined with other findings to alert authorities to danger. That was what happened when a Queens child was removed from the family home last week.

The family had been known to child welfare authorities after an older sibling had witnessed a fight between the parents. So when the schools called in October to report that the family’s 9-year-old had been absent for a week at the beginning of the year and had two more absences more recently, child welfare officials became concerned. Last week, when the mother was caught shoplifting with the 9-year-old in tow, child welfare acted to take the case to Family Court.

Kim McLaurin, attorney-in-charge of the juvenile division of the [Legal Aid Society](#) in Queens, said: “Before Nixzmary they would have just focused on the domestic abuse case and not looked at other kids in the family and asked, ‘Are they going to school?’ Now they are looking at a broader picture.”

Roughly 600 new child welfare staff members are now in place. Workers charged with investigating complaints have seen their

caseloads decrease since January. Currently, each worker handles an average of 14.3 cases, a number city officials want to bring down to about 12.

But Joseph M. Lauria, the chief administrative judge of New York City Family Court, says that even with increased staffing the courts are overwhelmed.

“I am not saying they are filing unnecessary cases,” he said of Children’s Services, “but there is no reserve for doubling the filings. The down side of Nixzmary Brown is that a good number of cases already in foster care are going to remain in care longer because we just can’t get to it.”

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November 17, 2006

Accused pedophile refereed

Police fear Farmington Hills man, charged in girl's assault, had inappropriate contact with others.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

FARMINGTON HILLS -- A suspected pedophile arrested Tuesday was a long-time local youth sports referee who was known to warn parents and coaches of the dangers of child predators, police have learned.

That's among the background uncovered by investigators as they began reviewing potential evidence, including child pornography, found inside the 46-year-old's home and car.

Richard R. Gerard is being held in the Oakland County Jail in lieu of \$2 million bond and is scheduled for a preliminary exam today in Berkley District Court for 12 felony-related counts of child sexual abuse involving an 11-year-old girl in 1998. If convicted, he could face up to life in prison.

"We've already recovered some child pornography from inside his car," said Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer. "The real job is going to be reviewing all these tapes for possible victims. That could take weeks."

Dwyer said more than a half-dozen detectives will sort through nearly 400 videotapes, some similar to the one that led to criminal charges against Gerard, that were seized Tuesday night during a police search of his residence on Country Bluff in the Crosswinds condominium complex at 14 Mile and Haggerty roads.

One of Gerard's ex-wives -- he's been married and divorced five times -- went to police this week after finding a videotape in her basement of Gerard performing sexual acts on a sleeping girl. The graphic videotape was allegedly filmed over a two- to three-year period beginning in 1998, when the child was 11, investigators believe. In all incidents, the girl appears unconscious.

Dwyer said one of the ex-wife's sons -- also Gerard's son -- identified the girl to investigators. The girl -- now 19 years old -- told investigators she recalled being given drugs and alcohol by Gerard when he used to baby-sit for her at her Berkley home while her mother was at work.

Police fear Gerard may have had inappropriate contact with other children. Court records indicate he has fathered three sons, now all in their 20s, by one former wife, and a daughter, now 7 years old, by another ex-wife.

But police are also concerned because Gerard, a Southgate mortgage loan officer, has lived throughout Metro Detroit over the past 25 years, including in Warren, Ferndale, Beverly Hills and Royal Oak.

Gerard, a referee for 25 years, was currently director of referees for Oakland Macomb Youth Football Association, according to Jackie Kage, vice chairwoman of the league, which supervises football and cheerleading for boys and girls, ages 6 to 13 years old, in 10 Oakland and Macomb county suburbs.

"We were shocked to hear this," she said. "We closely background everyone here, and there were times when he brought in articles about predators as examples of why we all had to be very careful about kids' safety. He seemed as concerned as anyone."

Kage said board members and parents were always present during games between August and November.

She stressed no adult is ever alone with any of the 2,000 children who participate in the weekend games. She said Gerard also refereed at high school sports events.

"He was very good and kind to the kids," she said.

"This is the typical 'You never think he would do something like that'," said Kage, who said members would vote to sever Gerard's relationship with the league at their Monday meeting.

"There was never one complaint about him," she said.

"I would know about it."

Anyone with information about Gerard is asked to call detectives at (248) 871-2779 or 2780.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

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Sexual predator faces more charges

By Michael P. McConnell
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

FERNDALE -- A Ferndale man recently convicted of sexually assaulting a 4-year-old girl and a 15-year-old girl was ordered Thursday to stand trial on new charges of possessing child pornography on his computer.

Michael J. Hall, 25, is already serving nine to 30 years in prison for taking a friend's daughter to a bathroom during a party at his house and assaulting her.

He was convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct in that case a few months ago.

Hall was also convicted this year of third-degree criminal sexual assault on a Ferndale girl, 15, whom he met online and had sex with at her parent's house, prosecutors say. He is serving six to 15 years in that case.

The new charges against Hall stem from the police investigation in the other cases when they seized his computer.

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Nicki Weisberger said even though Hall is already serving time it was important to bring the additional charges against him.

"If he is convicted of these charges it will probably keep him in prison longer," Weisberger said. "The longer you keep someone like this in prison the better off the community is."

The new charges against Hall are two counts of possessing child sexually abusive material, each a four-year felony; and two counts of using a computer to commit a crime, each a seven-year felony.

Weisberger said a conviction on the new charges could lead to Hall being sentenced as a habitual offender, which would lengthen the amount of time he would have to serve.

Hall was also convicted in 1996 in Pontiac of sexually assaulting a relative's 14-month-old girl while he was babysitting her.

At a preliminary hearing in Ferndale's 43rd District Court on Thursday, Hall waived his right to the hearing and he was ordered to stand trial in Oakland County Circuit Court.

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http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/111706/loc_predator001.shtml

Wayne County sues to control mental agency

BY NAOMI R. PATTON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 17, 2006

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano is suing Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the State of Michigan to maintain control over the county's mental health agency.

In Thursday's lawsuit in Wayne County Circuit Court, Ficano says Granholm and state legislators are illegally trying to force the county to create a mental health authority to replace the county's Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency.

If the county's agency is not an authority by Dec. 1, the state would begin penalizing the agency \$3.5 million a month. That money would be refunded if the agency becomes an authority before Sept. 30, 2007.

State legislators approved the penalty in the 2006-07 fiscal year budget.

County government currently runs the agency; an authority is more independent and receives funding directly from the state.

County officials say the funding cut would bring layoffs, as well as cutbacks and delays in services. The agency has about 47,000 clients.

State law permits county commissions to create mental health authorities.

The lawsuit seeks a preliminary injunction to prevent the funding cut, which could become moot because the County Commission recently approved a proposal to convert the agency to an authority.

The conversion will not be final until the Legislature passes, and the governor signs, a bill that allows Ficano to name all members of the board to oversee the new authority.

The current oversight board is made up of appointees made by the county executive and Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

*Contact **NAOMI R. PATTON** at 313-223-4485. Staff writer Zachary Gorchow contributed to this report.*

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Teen faces trial on arson charges

Friday, November 17, 2006

THE SAGINAW NEWS

A 14-year-old Saginaw youth will stand trial Tuesday, Jan. 9, in Saginaw County Probate Court on arson charges stemming from a spate of fires that caused more than \$200,000 in damage at more than 30 houses.

The teen pleaded not guilty Thursday before Referee Matt Dambro to charges of arson of a dwelling, conspiracy to commit arson and resisting and obstructing a police officer stemming from a Wednesday fire at 417 Ketcham.

Authorities say the teen is linked to a string of fires since late October.

The teen remains at the Saginaw County Juvenile Detention Center on a \$10,000 cash or surety bond.

Meanwhile, police said they could seek a warrant today against a 33-year-old Saginaw man in connection to fires on South Hamilton in the past two weeks. The suspect is in jail. v

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Plan to end homelessness endorsed by commission

You don't see them on park benches or under bridges as you do in large cities, but on any given day dozens of people may be homeless in Roscommon County.

In 2005, a survey conducted by the COOR Housing Coalition counted 50 families in Roscommon, Crawford, Ogemaw and Oscoda Counties who met the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of homeless. But the four-county survey also found 64 families who were "doubled up," or staying temporarily with friends or relatives. Although HUD does not consider them homeless, "that doesn't mean they don't need help," said Roscommon County Housing Director Patricia Marshall. Including "doubled up" families, the COOR coalition estimates 1% of the population in the four counties is homeless.

Recognizing the problem, Roscommon County Commissioners have proclaimed Nov. 12-18 Homeless Awareness Week and endorsed the COOR coalition's 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness.

Programs to help the homeless here are pretty meager, but improving. Roscommon and Crawford Counties share a grant of \$6,350 a year to help prevent homelessness. The money is used to help residents avoid utility shut-offs or eviction or foreclosure from their homes and to pay first month's rent for a new residence. Oscoda and Ogemaw Counties share an equal grant. The money helps an average of 25 families a year in the four counties, but Marshall's office receives six to eight calls a week for assistance.

The COOR Continuum of Care this year received 10 vouchers from the Transitional Supportive Housing Lease Assistance Program, which helped four single parents in Roscommon County rent homes near their jobs. The program also helps recipients improve their education and the health of their families. To date, all of the recipients still are housed and working toward their other goals.

Roscommon County receives 71 Michigan State Housing Development Authority Housing Choice vouchers, but has a waiting list of 100 for that program.

Limited help for the homeless also is available through the Department of Human Services, churches, the Salvation Army, the St. Vincent DePaul Society, Northern Lakes Community Mental Health, Michigan Works! and the Veterans Administration. Riverhouse Shelter provides temporary homes for homeless women and children, but no men. The Au Sable Free Clinic in Grayling provides free medical services.

"It's easier and cheaper to help them catch up that rent than to wait till they get that foreclosure or eviction notice," Marshall said, but all of the funding for homeless programs administered through her office has been used up for this year. However, the 10-year plan offers hope for the future. In September, Michigan became the first state to have all its counties adopt such plans, which will qualify them for more grants.

Here are some of the COOR Coalition's goals:

- Starting this year, an education program to help renters become better tenants is being offered. The coalition says it has reduced the number of complaints from both landlords and tenants.
- By 2010, the coalition hopes to have rental codes in effect in all four counties to reduce substandard housing. The coalition also hopes to have temporary shelters for the homeless in each county.
- By 2016, the coalition hopes to have one transitional housing unit available in each county to help released prisoners, domestic violence victims, youths leaving the foster care system and others work toward independence.
- By 2017, a "housing advocacy group" of advisors and mentors would be formed to help families "stay housed."

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November 16, 2006*



Homeless man facing robbery charges

Friday, November 17, 2006

DARRYL Q. TUCKER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Prosecutors have charged a homeless Kent County man with holding up two mid-Michigan businesses.

Thomas J. Hamlin, 55, of Wyoming faces two counts of armed robbery Nov. 13 at the Admiral station, 6260 State in Saginaw Township, and at the Carrollton Bar, 3461 Carrollton in Carrollton Township.

During Hamlin's arraignment Thursday, Saginaw County Chief District Judge Kyle Higgs Tarrant set a \$200,000 cash or surety bond.

Police said they found Hamlin sleeping in his 1989 Chevrolet on Tuesday, but declined to say where.

District Judge M. Randall Jurens will conduct a Wednesday, Nov. 29, preliminary hearing to determine whether Hamlin should stand trial in Circuit Court. A conviction could lead to a sentence of up to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

About 6 p.m. Monday, a gray-bearded man looked tipsy as he walked into the gasoline station, police said. The robber indicated he had a gun but did not show a weapon as he grabbed cash and ran toward a nearby motel.

The station clerk described the robber as a 6-foot-1-inch white man in his 50s who wore a green hat and coat.

About 2 p.m. Tuesday, a man fitting the same description robbed the Carrollton Bar, police said. The robber feigned having a gun but didn't reveal a weapon as he took money and fled, detectives said.

No one was hurt in either heist, authorities said.

Police said Hamlin is a suspect in a third armed robbery but declined to provide details.v

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Published November 17, 2006

In a 10-minute span, gunmen kill 2, wound three in Detroit

A person of interest in custody; police
unsure of motive

By Cecil Angel and Ben Schmitt
Associated Press

DETROIT - Two gunmen, armed with
a rifle and handgun, shot five people -
killing two - within 10 minutes
Thursday morning on the city's west
side.

As crime-scene investigators
descended on the shooting scene, a
two or three block area near Linwood
and Joy, police launched a manhunt
for the shooters in the neighborhood.

Police said they did not yet know a
motivation for the shootings and
hadn't drawn any connections among
the victims. One person described as
a person of interest was in custody by
evening.



(Photo by CARLOS OSORIO/Associated Press)

Investigating: Police look over the shooting scene in west
Detroit after a series of shootings that killed two people
and wounded three others in the span of 10 minutes
Thursday morning. All the shootings were in a three- to
four-block area on the city's west side, Detroit police
spokesman James Tate said.

According to police, a 58-year-old woman parked in a Chevy Impala in front of the Angel Land Day Care Center, on the 8600 block of Linwood near Blaine, was killed.

Minutes later, a 49-year-old man, Arthur James Smith, of Detroit, was shot and killed a block away on Linwood. Elton Ash, 51, was shot in the left elbow in the same incident.

Within 10 minutes, two more men were shot and wounded on the 2400 block of Taylor, not far from the first two shootings. One was struck in the foot by a stray bullet while in his backyard, police said.

A second man was struck in the buttocks.

Police spokesman James Tate said the three wounded people did not appear to have life-threatening injuries. They were taken to Henry Ford Hospital.

The 58-year-old victim in the Chevy Impala was identified as Ophelia Fry, of Detroit, an employee at the Angel Land daycare-latchkey center that cares for children ages 2 to 12.

Bauford Carmichael, 65, Fry's husband, said his wife had been a cook at the child care center for five years. Fry also was president of her block club and active with her neighborhood CB patrol, he said.

But "she really loved that job. She loved being with the children," he said.

At 6:30 a.m., Mamie Robinson, 33, arrived at the child care center with her 6- year old son, Silas Moses. She saw patrol cars and Fry's gray 2007 Impala parked out front of the childcare center with the driver's side window shot out.

"Somebody had told me Miss Fry had been shot.. I still can't believe it," Robinson said. "She was such a sweet pleasant person. I don't know how anyone could have done this to her."

Evelyn Wallace, 82, who lives in the downstairs unit of the two-flat on Taylor where Anderson lived, said she "heard shots about 6:30 a.m."

"I don't even look out, I hear shots all the time," Wallace said.

Later, she said, she saw flashing lights, which turned out to be emergency vehicles.

Police were able to interview the three survivors, who provided descriptions of the gunmen.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, is offering a \$10,000 reward for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

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Published November 17, 2006

Habitat gets cleanup grant

\$249,750 will remove contaminants at warehouse

By Jeremy W. Steele
Lansing State Journal

Lansing Habitat for Humanity will get help from a state grant to clean up recently discovered pollution at its new home.

The nonprofit will use a \$249,750 grant from the state Department of Environmental Quality to remove contaminated soil from the grounds of a 15,000-square-foot warehouse on Benjamin Drive it bought in June 2005.

Officials found a 6,000-gallon underground storage tank at the site earlier this year when they went to install a storm water retention system.

The discovery has delayed Habitat's move from its current home on Haco Drive in Lansing. The grant should help the group finish work by the end of the year, Executive Director Denise Paquette said.

"When all this environmental stuff came out earlier this year, it put a standstill on the work outside," she said.

As a nonprofit, Habitat didn't qualify for many of the state and local incentives available to clean up such brownfield sites.

The grant is part of a state program to help clean up polluted sites for redevelopment. The DEQ has provided more than \$132 million in grants and loans under the program since 1988.

"A lot of properties, the sole reason they're not being reused is because of environmental problems at the site," DEQ spokesman Robert McCann said.

Habitat, which builds about seven houses a year, was attracted to the site because it was an affordable option to grow its ReStore retail operation and warehouse space.

"It's not quite as good of a deal as it was a year and a half ago," Paquette said with a laugh. "It's still going to be fine."

Contact Jeremy W. Steele at 377-1015 or jwsteele@lsj.com.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Michigan Adoption Day event raises awareness

By SUSAN FIELD
Clare Managing Editor

For the last three years, the Isabella County Trial Court has taken part in a statewide effort to find loving, permanent homes for children that have been placed in foster care.

This year is no different, with the county hosting a Michigan Adoption Day event at the Isabella County Trial Court Nov. 21 from 1 to 3 p.m.

Michigan Adoption Day is an effort to raise awareness about the thousands of children in foster care, waiting for permanent, loving families that will see judges throughout the state finalizing adoptions and honoring families who foster and adopt children.

Michigan Adoption Day

■ **What:** Effort to raise awareness about children in foster care, waiting for permanent, loving families that will see judges throughout the state finalizing adoptions and honoring families who foster and adopt children.

■ **When:** Tuesday from 1 to 3 p.m.

■ **Where:** Isabella County Trial Court, outside of courtroom one on the second floor

Locally, the event is being held outside courtroom one on the second floor of the trial court building, where Judge William Ervin and representatives from the Michigan Department of Human

Services will be on hand to answer questions.

Informational handouts and refreshments will be provided.

The event is also a route officials take to recruit adoptive parents and let them know that there are many children in need of permanent homes, said Lauri Liscomb, an adoption specialist with the department of human services' Mt. Pleasant office.

The children in need of permanent homes have been placed in foster care after being taken from their biological parents because of abuse or neglect, Liscomb said.

In every case, the parent's rights have been terminated, she said.

Isabella County has participated in

Michigan Adoption Day since its inception four years ago because children in foster care need permanent homes, Ervin said.

The event also helps DHS find foster and adoptive families for children in need, particularly pre-teen and teenaged children, Liscomb said.

The local adoption day event also provides an avenue for people thinking about adoption or fostering to get more information, the judge said.

"This is a great opportunity for people who are thinking about adopting or becoming foster parents," Ervin said.

During the local event, Ervin and DHS representatives will honor two local families for their efforts in fostering and adopting children, the judge said.

Michigan's deficit climbs to \$173 million

Red ink raises specter of tax, fee hikes

BY KATHLEEN GRAY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 17, 2006

Unless penny-pinching by Michigan officials shows a dramatic effect when departments close their books next month, the governor and Legislature would have to deal with a budget shortfall estimated at \$173 million, including \$120 million in the School Aid Fund.

The potential shortfall was reported by the Senate Fiscal Agency, which said sales, property and income taxes were down by \$223 million for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, but revenues from the soon-to-be-eliminated single business tax were \$50 million more than predicted.

Greg Bird, spokesman for the state's budget office, said Thursday that some departments might not have used all their budgeted money, and that could reduce the potential shortfall when they close their books. The state also built in a \$25-million cushion to last year's budget.

The state has plenty of recent experience when it comes to cutting back: Since taking office in 2003, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature have dealt with about \$4 billion in budget deficits.

The problem, said Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Grandville, is that there's not much more to trim.

If cuts must be made, the state has options including reducing the per-pupil stipend given to schools, shifting money from the general fund to the School Aid Fund, using money set aside for other purposes or finding new revenues, which translates into the unattractive prospect of tax or fee hikes.

Also down this year, but not included in the Senate Fiscal Agency numbers, are revenues from the 19-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax. The revenues, which go directly into road repairs, are down \$13 million for the first six months of fiscal 2006.

Contact **KATHLEEN GRAY** at 313-223-4407 or gray@freepress.com.

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New Focus on Affirmative Action

Advertisement

Ballot Measures Add to Debate on Continuation of Programs

By Elizabeth Williamson and Valerie Strauss
Washington Post Staff Writers
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The number of minorities -- particularly black Americans -- winning government contracts and being admitted to public colleges and universities in California has dwindled since a ballot measure was passed 10 years ago outlawing preferential treatment for minorities in those areas, according to a study released yesterday.

The report comes as the longtime controversy over affirmative action is gaining new attention. Michigan voters last week adopted a constitutional amendment essentially taking the same action as California, and the American Bar Association is facing criticism from some groups for strengthening its diversity requirements for accreditation of law schools.

The study of California's Proposition 209 shows that it has had a major effect, according to Ellis Cose, who wrote the report for the Institute for Justice and Journalism at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication.

At the University of California's two flagships, the campuses in Berkeley and Los Angeles, the impact of Proposition 209 was immediate: The number of black and Hispanic freshmen admitted the year after the law took effect fell by half.

In California's transportation system, the report says, two-thirds of the minority contractors certified to do business with the state when the law went into effect have folded. "Once Proposition 209 passed, the contracts just dried up," Cose said.

The study comes after Michigan voters approved a ballot measure that aims, through a constitutional amendment, to bar public universities and state and local governments from discriminating or giving preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin.

The vote shows that "there is a huge sense on the part of white voters that affirmative action needs to end," said Cose, an author and columnist for Newsweek. Although the national implication remains uncertain, "if this thing is put before states where there is a significant white majority, it's likely to pass," he said.

Michigan is a textbook example of what Cose calls the "chipping away of affirmative action," a process that began in the 1970s and gained political steam in the 1990s. In 1974, the Supreme Court rejected as a throwback to "separate but equal" a Detroit plan to bus city children to suburban schools. In 2003, the court ruled that a diverse student body was important enough to support race-conscious admissions at the University of Michigan's law school.

"The measure in Michigan, as did the measure in California, passed along very clearly racial lines," Cose said, showing that "even though jurists see a legitimate state interest in diversity voters, at least white voters don't."

Opponents to last week's ballot measure promise a legal battle, as do proponents. Although the Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled in favor of affirmative action programs, the court's written opinions have signaled for years that the programs' end may be near.

The question, the California report says, is whether Americans, decades after Jim Crow, still feel legally obligated to help boost people whose race puts them at an economic and educational disadvantage. Affirmative action opponents say special treatment based on race implies lesser treatment of others based on their majority status. So by addressing one injustice, they say, the programs commit another.

Because college admissions of minority students have slid nationwide in recent years, many admissions directors have changed their recruiting focus to identify not only minorities but low-income students, including whites.

"In the last couple of years, there has been a much more concerted effort to do this in a race-neutral way," said Lee Coffin, admissions dean at Tufts University in Massachusetts. "The poor white kid has a voice that needs to be heard, in addition to the kind of racial diversity we want to create."

University of Virginia Admissions Dean Jack Blackburn said his school has changed policies and part of its recruiting approach to find more needy applicants. "We realized that we are not providing access," he said. "We are not educating very many kids from low-income backgrounds. The numbers are shockingly low."

That, he said, was one key reason the university recently announced it was dropping its binding early-decision program.

Whether last week's elections -- which returned control of Congress to Democrats, who generally favor affirmative action -- will have an impact on such programs' future remains to be seen.

An important test could come next month, when the American Bar Association undergoes review of its authority to accredit university law schools. A Department of Education hearing, aimed at recertifying the ABA's Council of the Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar as the official accrediting agency for law schools, is expected to be a forum for complaints.

The ABA recently rewrote a diversity standard for law schools, requiring more concrete action to promote a diverse faculty, staff and student body. The new standard drew fire from both sides of the debate: The Congressional Black Caucus did not think it went far enough, and the Bush administration's Commission on Civil Rights said this past summer that it went too far.

The National Association of Scholars has asked the Education Department not to renew the ABA's accrediting power if it does not eliminate all requirements of racial, ethnic and gender diversity from its accreditation standards.

Sources familiar with the issue said the department is divided over the question, with some administration political appointees sympathetic to that request.

Even if affirmative action were to disappear, "the universities are going to try very hard to admit a reasonable number of minority candidates," Cose said. "But they are inevitably going to see the numbers go down."

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News Release

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Ottawa County collaborative receives \$160,000 Great Start Collaborative grant

Early Childhood Investment Corporation grants focus on early childhood development and care

November 17, 2006

HOLLAND – The Ottawa County Great Start Collaborative today accepted a \$160,000 grant from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) to strengthen early childhood development and care in the county.

ECIC Chief Executive Officer Judy Samelson and Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow announced the grant together with Ottawa Area Intermediate School District Superintendent Karen McPhee.

The grant is part of a \$3.15 million award to 21 Great Start Collaboratives across Michigan that coordinate community resources and supports to help children from birth to age five and their families. A total of 70 percent of Michigan's poor and minority children now live in a county where a Great Start Collaborative is being convened.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, announced in Governor Jennifer Granholm's 2005 State of the State address, provides grants from a mix of public and private funding sources. Grant funding was made possible in August when the Michigan Legislature approved a \$1 million appropriation for early childhood collaboratives across the state. This appropriation triggered matching funds from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Fourteen other state collaboratives were funded earlier this year by the Department of Human Services.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors including government, business, civic, faith, education, and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," Samelson said. "We're grateful for the support of our partners who recognize the importance of investing in early childhood programs."

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. In addition to the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, 21 other intermediate school districts and regional educational service agencies around the state also were awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great Start Collaboratives.

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“Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates,” Udow said. “By improving the skills of a large fraction of the workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state’s ability to compete in the global market.”

ECIC is a unique public, nonprofit corporation created to invest in Michigan's youngest citizens. By educating, motivating and involving Michigan citizens in efforts to build and promote a system of supports for young children and their families, all Michigan children can make a Great Start!

For more information about the ECIC, visit <http://www.ecic4kids.org>

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